

A N O V E L

THE LUMINATI



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BURKETT

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ILLUMINATI

Larry Burkett



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P R O L O G U E

THE COLLAPSE OF AMERICA

On February 16, 2001, the President of the United States scheduled an emergency press conference at the White House to discuss his executive order to suspend the Congress. In normal fashion, half of the media staff were assembled at the White House, while the other half were focused on the Senate.

The hastily assembled media room in the Senate building was packed with news people. The last eight years had been a media dream. First the depression of 1996 had sent millions of Americans into the streets to protest as they saw their homes repossessed and businesses ruined. Then the 2000 election of liberal Senator Mark Hunt to the presidency was a clear mandate to government: Restore the economy and stop the rampant crime wave sweeping the nation.

Hunt's reforms pitted him against the Congress, as funding for essential services was drastically reduced. Now, in an unprecedented move, President Hunt had suspended Congress.

"Ten seconds. Stand by. Rolling."

"Good evening, America. This is the World News Network, coming to you from the floor of the Congress, where for only the second time in the last one hundred years the House has decided to take up the gauntlet and actively seek to impeach a president. It did so once before, in 1974, but then-president Richard Nixon resigned the office before he could be impeached. There is no evidence that President Hunt is considering resigning. In fact, he has all but dared the Congress to try to impeach him.

"Here with me now is Senator John Grant, the senate minority leader and the strongest opponent of President Hunt.

"Senator Grant, what is your reaction to the president's move, and is it constitutional?"

"The president invoked the Balanced Budget Amendment and virtually shut down the Congress. This is an unconscionable decision."

"Explain the Balanced Budget Amendment, Senator."

"It is the constitutional amendment passed during the previous administration, which gives the president line-item veto power to control the flow of funds through the government. It was first used to freeze the United Arabs' assets after they invaded Israel in 1997."

"How has President Hunt used this bill?"

"Just today he announced that all funding for operating the Congress will be suspended for the duration of the fiscal year."

"What exactly does that mean?"

"It means that we can't operate for the next five months. It also means that the president holds the reins of this government, since Congress can't pay its bills."

"Kind of the old 'golden rule,' isn't it, Senator?"

"What?"

"He who holds the gold makes the rules."

"Well, the president may think so, but I'm about to show him he's dead wrong. I believe there are enough votes in the Congress to bring him to trial. His actions are clearly unconstitutional."

In his earpiece the commentator heard his director comment, "Keep it up. This is the best stuff since the Nixon investigation. Our Insta-pol shows that we have over 70 percent of Americans watching us right now. Hold it a minute. We have a news bulletin coming in now from the White House. Stand by, we're going to the White House now. . . ."

"Senator Grant, we have just received an urgent message from the White House. Please stand by while we get this latest update."

The life-sized monitors in the newsroom sprang to life. The familiar face of Linda Lipsey, WNN White House correspondent, appeared on the screen. "I'm standing in the press room of the White House now, where the president will be addressing the nation in just a moment," she reported. Even as she spoke, the door adjoining the press room and the Oval Office opened, and President Hunt strode through, flanked by secret service agents. The room, which had housed so many past briefings with other presidents, seemed to take on a life of its own with news people and their crews pushing and shoving each other for the best positions.

President Mark Hunt was dressed in his usual, gray pin-striped Shap Brothers suit. His black hair, with only the hint of gray around the temples, gave him the appearance of a Hollywood-cast politician.

A hush came over the room as the president stepped to the podium with the familiar presidential seal emblazoned on it.

Cal Rutland, the president's ever-present aide, took his place behind and a little to the left side of the podium. And, as he did, Linda involuntarily shuddered. She had covered three presidents for the network and had always worked well with their press contacts, but Rutland was somehow different. His cold, dead eyes were shadows of evil with no sign of life in them. *Or, maybe, no soul*, she thought.

The normal fanfare surrounding a presidential press conference was totally absent. Clearly each member of the attending press sensed the sobriety of the occasion. There was tension in the room.

A solemn President Hunt began, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have something to say that is of the most critical importance to our nation. I wanted the American people to hear this announcement directly. That is why I called this briefing.

"As you well know, fellow citizens, our nation is struggling for its very economic survival. As your president, I am empowered to invoke the Balanced Budget Amendment to reestablish the stability of our monetary system. I have chosen to do this by two methods: First, I have authorized the national budget director's office to freeze all government spending until a new budget can be drafted that will match our income and expenses. Second, I have authorized the implementation of a new electronic monetary system known as 'Data-Net' that will restabilize our currency. Without this, my advisers tell me, the entire economy might collapse. But even with these changes, the crisis is not past. With the escalation of tensions in the Middle East and the disastrous increase in petroleum prices, we face the possibility of a worldwide depression.

"Clearly the Congress lacks the will or the courage to deal with this crisis, despite my consistent warnings that action must be taken quickly."

Senator Grant nearly leaped out of his chair when he heard the president's last statement. "Lies! Lies!" Grant muttered through clenched teeth. Common sense told Grant it was useless to rail at a monitor. *I'll wait my time*, he thought, trying to control his anger. As *minority leader, the networks will want my rebuttal*. Shifting his attention back to the screen, he heard:

"Congress has recently attempted to usurp my authority and return control of the economy to the greedy self-interest groups whose policies got us into this disaster. I simply cannot allow that to happen. I feel too great a compassion for the millions of jobless, whose families will suffer through no fault of their own.

"Reluctantly, I have suspended the funding for this session of Con-

gress," the handsome president stated in an apologetic tone. "Until this crisis is passed, I am declaring a national emergency and assuming total responsibility for the nation's welfare. Earlier this morning I instructed the Justice Department to initiate the necessary petition to the Supreme Court. At two o'clock this afternoon, by a margin of five to four, the justices confirmed my actions. I am therefore reallocating \$800 million, appropriated to the Congressional operating budget, to the government Jobs Services Program.

"Remember, fellow Americans, we are all in this together. You have elected me as your leader to make these very difficult decisions. We cannot allow those who would use your grief for their own benefit to destroy what we have worked so hard to build. Thank you, and good evening."

With that the president walked off the platform and through the open door that led to his office, leaving the stunned press crews behind.

C H A P T E R

1

JEFF WELLS

The events leading up to the congressional showdown in February, 2001, had actually begun two years earlier under the most unlikely circumstances. With the presidential elections coming up the next year, three probable candidates were vying for the position. Senate Majority Leader Mark Hunt was running under the banner of progressive leadership to stop the nation's economic slide into a major depression. Considered a radical liberal by many within his own party, he was finding it difficult to garner the support he needed to replace the incumbent president, Andrew Kilborne. Even with the economic problems, Kilborne was considered to be the Democratic party's best hope.

The wild card was the ultra-liberal Governor Jerry Crow of California. His main appeal was to the fanatics that made up the National Civil Liberties Union, the Gay Power Society, and the National Organization for Women's Rights.

In one of those strange turn of events, an incident at the California Institute of Technology would change the whole complexion of the presidential race and the country.

For decades, an enormous earthquake had been predicted for the California coast. Recent minor tremors had been interpreted as forerunners of the "big one." In a coordinated effort, designed to more accurately predict the location and intensity of the quake, a study group had been established at Cal Tech which brought together some of the best talent available. After several weeks of exhaustive research, the group was preparing to consolidate its findings and issue a statement to the government's office of geological study at the Livermore Laboratory in California.

Most of the research group reached the same conclusions; the earthquake would hit the San Francisco Bay area with a force of approximately 6 on the Richter scale. However, one of the group, a doc-

toral candidate by the name of Jeff Wells, had reached a radically different conclusion. Working from a uniquely different perspective, Wells predicted that the big quake, with a magnitude of at least 8.2, would occur beneath the islands of Japan between January and May of 1999.

As Dr. Jack Rhinehart, the project leader, handed Jeff's paper back, his sarcasm was evident as he addressed his assembled team. "Well, it seems that young Mr. Wells is fallible after all. According to his calculations, or his miscalculations I should say, he has the earthquake occurring next year, and about four thousand miles west of here. Thankfully for us, that will not happen, especially since he shows the epicenter to be in Tokyo, rather than San Francisco, as the correct equations show."

Jeff blushed when the entire group laughed, but he took the teasing good naturedly. Then, looking down at his calculations, he said courageously, "I'm sorry, sir, but I am correct. The other calculations are wrong."

Professor Rhinehart wheeled around, his eyes flashing with anger. "Just who do you think you are, young man? These equations came from the computer center at Livermore Laboratory. Do you actually think your program is right and theirs is wrong?"

To Rhinehart's utter amazement Jeff answered, "Yes, sir, I do. You see, I built in variables to compensate for some additional geological indicators. I believe there are signs in previous test data pointing to a major build-up in the primary plate area under Japan."

"How could you possibly know that?" the professor questioned. No sooner had the words left his lips than he regretted saying them. Suddenly he sounded like the student and Jeff the instructor.

Jeff responded quietly but confidently, "It's just that in setting up the equation I noticed there might be an additional factor that had not been taken into consideration. My equation indicates that the next major quake will be much stronger than expected and centered over the plate convergence in the Pacific. Basically that's right under the population center of Tokyo. Maybe you could have Livermore check it out."

With that, the whole group roared. The idea of having one of the premier computer centers in the world, noted for its physics in tracking and predicting earthquakes, recheck its program equation because a junior instructor said they were wrong, was laughable. Only Professor Rhinehart didn't share in the humor.

His eyes still flashing with anger, Rhinehart challenged Jeff, hoping to belittle him. "I'll make you a deal, Mr. Master Programmer. I'll have Livermore recheck your equations. When they are proven wrong, you will apologize to this group."

After a brief pause, Jeff asked cautiously, "And, what if I'm right?"

"What did you say?" Rhinehart growled as he slammed the papers down on the desk in front of him.

"What if my analysis is correct, sir? Will you notify the proper authorities so preparations can be made? An earthquake of this magnitude in Japan will generate a fairly significant tidal wave."

Rhinehart snapped back, "I will personally call the news media and notify them of your electrifying revelation. I worked on the program in question myself; that's how I know it cannot be wrong. We had nearly thirty mathematicians working with us, checking every possible iteration."

"I don't see how they missed this, then," Jeff said. "I found a paper written by Dr. Landill of the JPL space division on the influence of gravitational forces on satellite orbits. From his calculations, it seems clear that changes in the earth's gravitational forces cause variations in low earth satellites. So I factored in the variations in the orbits of these satellites over the western Pacific. I believe the results are fairly conclusive."

The meeting ended with Professor Rhinehart furiously cramming the papers into his battered briefcase. He was tired of all the talk about the genius Jeff Wells, whose IQ topped out well above the maximum 180 registered by conventional tests. Faculty gossip just added to the boy-genius myth. It was rumored that Wells had developed a complete, computerized star chart by the time he was twelve.

When one of the physics professors said he had seen a program written by Jeff that computed the orbits of all the man-made satellites, Professor Rhinehart had retorted, "So what? So has the group at the Jet Propulsion Lab." The other professor had countered with, "Yes, but Wells did his at age fifteen from information supplied by magazines and on a PC!"

Much of Rhinehart's negative attitude was because he had been the rising star as a student at Cal Tech and then later as a research faculty member. He was not about to share the limelight with anyone. So when Wells was recruited to do his graduate work at Cal Tech, the "green-eyed monster" reared its head.

"He had better breaks than I did early on," Rhinehart said defensively whenever he heard anyone lauding Wells' abilities in the faculty lounge. "His mother was a research scientist and adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. With her as a tutor, he couldn't help but succeed."

The more he was around Jeff Wells, the more miserable Rhinehart felt because inside he knew Wells was a whole level above his own

intellect. Wells had a singular gift of being able to take very complex equations and reduce them to simplified programs that would run on just about any computer system to which he had access.

Rhinehart had done everything in his power to keep Wells off the geological research project. But in the end the final selection had been made by the faculty team, and Jeff Wells was the first student selected to assist the senior staff. He was resigned to the fact that he could not block Wells' appointment to the project, so the professor shifted his energy to making Jeff's life as miserable as possible—a task for which Jack Rhinehart was well suited.

I've got him now, Rhinehart thought gleefully as he hastened to maximize on Wells' single error thus far. He called his counterpart at Livermore, Dr. William Eison. "Bill, this is Jack Rhinehart. I need your help."

"Good to hear from you, Jack," the burly mathematician on the other end said, but he was thinking *I wonder what this jerk wants. I was hoping I was rid of him when he went up to Cal Tech.*

"One of our research students ran our seismology equations through the university's computers and came out with some different results. Obviously he's made an error and my equations are correct, but I'd like to have you run them through your system."

Yeah, in other words, there's a new star on the horizon and you want to extinguish his light real quick, the Livermore scientist added silently. "Okay, Jack, I'll run your numbers through Gerta, but we cooked that program three ways from Sunday already. If there was a flaw, I think we would have caught it. What does your whiz kid think he's found anyway? Have we missed the blow off of Mount Saint Helens again?" Eison asked.

"No, but listen to this! He says his equations show the big quake will hit Japan some time early next year, and it will be about an eight."

"You're kidding! I'll be sure to run his numbers twice. If he's right, I'll move to Arizona and buy some beach-front property."

"You don't mean to say that you think his figures could be right, do you?" Rhinehart asked incredulously.

"Most probably not," the overweight scientist said as he shifted his sagging paunch under his belt. *I've got to get on that diet one of these days*, he thought. *Too much cafeteria food.* "But who knows when it comes to computers? I still don't really trust 'em. One of these days we'll all be taking orders from one of 'em if we're not real careful."

"Probably so," Rhinehart agreed. "Idiot," he said aloud after he hung up the phone.

Two days later Jack Rhinehart was roused out of a sound sleep by

the electronic beeping of his telephone. "Yes, who is it?" he growled into the receiver.

"Rhinehart, it's Eison. That kid who ran these numbers . . . who is he?"

"He's a doctoral candidate by the name of Jeff Wells. Why? Why are you calling at six in the morning anyway?"

"We've been at these numbers for the last twenty hours and we can't find a flaw in his logic. It looks like your whiz kid has hit upon the greatest discovery in seismology since the seismograph was invented."

"You mean to say you believe his calculations?" Rhinehart shouted as he bolted upright up in bed. "But that's nonsense. He doesn't know beans about earthquakes."

"Maybe not, but I can tell you this, his insight is like none I've ever seen in my sixty-two years. We need him here as quickly as possible. Some of our boys don't fully grasp how his equation works. It would appear that he has created a three-dimensional relationship."

"A three-dimensional equation? That's impossible," Rhinehart sputtered.

"Never say 'impossible,'" Eison said with an air of contempt in his tone. "Einstein was working on three-dimensional equations in his last days, but he coded everything so nobody has been able to crack it since. Maybe your boy is the one. Whatever . . . we're sending the jet down to John Wayne Airport to pick him up in an hour. Have him there."

Depression swept over the scrawny instructor as he heard this news. *A dumb kid is going to get the recognition I should have*, he thought as he slipped his heavy glasses on. "I'll come up with him, Bill."

"Sorry, we don't need more hands right now, and we're gonna be overrun with reporters and politicians when this news breaks."

After hanging up the phone, Rhinehart sat in numbed silence. Then he called one of his lab assistants and told him to notify Wells of the waiting plane. He was fuming when he slammed the phone down. "There's no justice," he moaned. "No justice at all."

That plane ride to the Livermore Laboratory would change Jeff Wells' life forever. For the next three days he was bombarded with questions about how he had devised the quantum equations used to integrate all the billions of bits of data used in his calculations.

Jeff spent hours sitting around the big conference table in the "think tank" room at Livermore, trying to explain his equations to the ten top physicists at the research facility. Often in frustration they would throw up their hands and demand that Jeff diagram his concept

on the chalkboard. More often than not, all this accomplished was more frustration.

One day as he was being questioned, Jeff stood and leaned over the table, his big frame giving him more the appearance of a line-backer than a scientist. "I can't explain what I don't understand myself," he said politely. "Somehow I just see problems in more than one dimension. I don't have to think about it. Usually the equations just come to mind."

"But I don't understand, Dr. Wells," one of the obviously frustrated mathematicians said gruffly as he leaned forward in his chair in a manner meant to impress his colleagues. "Who taught you to do this?"

"No one taught me, I guess," Jeff responded as he sat back down in his chair. "And it's not 'Doctor.' It's just plain Jeff."

The red-faced scientist sat back in his chair, careful not to notice the smirks on the faces of several of the less-stuffy scientists.

The focus of the conference shifted from questioning Jeff on his formula to why he predicted the earthquake to be imminent and centered in the Tokyo area. He explained his computations to the small group of scientists, who were transfixed at not only what they heard but what they saw.

Jeff pushed a button recessed into the table top, swinging a hidden computer keyboard into position. As he began to type in the commands that initialized his program, the only sound that could be heard in the room was the slight mechanical ring of the plastic keys as he punched the data in. As if in unison with his actions, the wall on the opposite end of the room divided and began to retract into a hidden cavity, revealing a wall-sized computer screen.

Dr. Eison, along with Jeff, had labored several days to convert Jeff's program to operate on the massive Cray computer system nicknamed "Gerta."

The display screen, covering nearly the entire wall, sprang to life. A computer-generated model of the earth was displayed in full color: The oceans were painted a light shade of blue and the land masses reflected variations of green and brown. The known geological faults were displayed as red dashed lines, and small glistening satellites circled the globe at all heights and directions.

Jeff began to demonstrate his program while Dr. Eison discussed the concept of using variations in the satellites' orbits to monitor changes in the earth's magma. By the end of the thirty-minute session, those in attendance were believers.

Later that day, Jeff was asked to repeat the demonstration for the

benefit of the entire Livermore scientific team and the reporters who had been invited.

"No one can be absolutely certain of the timing of a major earthquake," Jeff said as he sat down at the computer console and began initiating his program once again. "The difficulty is that the forces are released as the earth's plates slide past each other. Friction can cause the force to build up and suddenly release or skip, much the same as when you press chalk against a chalkboard. Sometimes it slides along; other times it grates and skips."

When he heard Dr. Eison clear his throat and noticed the frowns from some of the attending seismologists, Jeff realized he had committed a *faux pas*; he had taken a complex technical subject and reduced it to laymen's terms. That made a big hit with the press, but it rankled those who made their living by keeping things complicated.

"Anyway," he continued, "Dr. Landill of JPL Labs documented minute changes in the orbits of several satellites throughout the last two decades, which were unaccountable except for changes in the earth's gravitational field. These were thought to be random changes and largely ignored, except by the satellite trackers. I felt they might be related to earthquakes on the surface so I programmed an equation to factor in these changes with the known epicenters of recent quakes."

"Impossible," argued one of the scientists who had missed the earlier session. "We have been trying for years to accumulate and process that kind of data. We can't do it even on the Cray 1612, and it has thirty billion bytes of RAM."

"I believe you can now," Jeff responded confidently as he pressed the "enter" key on the big console. Instantly the full-sized screen on the wall blossomed into a scaled replica of the earth in three dimensions, just as it had in the earlier demonstration. With each stroke of the keys, more detail came into focus. Suddenly satellites began spinning around the globe, each in its own unique orbit.

As Jeff manipulated his program, the red lines began to appear once more on the earth's surface. "These represent active known faults," he explained for the benefit of the reporters and scientists who had missed the earlier session. "Notice how the orbits of the satellites crossing over the fault lines cause them to shift."

The shift in the orbits of the low-altitude satellites was the most dramatic; the high-altitude satellites had the least reaction.

Jeff explained, "I have exaggerated the orbital variations to make them more measurable. The satellite orbits you see on the screen are amplified by a factor of ten to the fourth power." Even the most stoic scientists stared in awe as they watched the computer-enhanced graph-

ics display the orbits of several hundred satellites superimposed over fault lines in the earth's surface. Each knew that what he was seeing was as revolutionary to the field of geology as the splitting of the atom was to physics.

"How can we be sure that your program is accurately depicting these changes and not creating them?" someone in the group asked.

"I thought that might be a possibility too," Jeff replied patiently, "so I applied the equation to some past seismic activity to verify the results."

Swiftly moving his fingers across the keys, Jeff initiated another sub-routine. The screen shifted from a total earth view to the continent of Asia. A dark red line dominated the landscape.

"This was the site of the 1996 earthquake in Beijing, China," he said, still typing in commands. "It measured 6.7 and resulted in the loss of approximately 1.5 million lives. As you can see, the actual date and magnitude are displayed on the screen. Thus far, this is historical data gathered from seismographic devices in the area. Now we'll roll the program back and use only the data known before November 16, 1996—the actual date of the disaster."

As Jeff typed in the commands, an observer in the back of the room was drafting a memo to his boss. It read: "Senator Mark Hunt. Believe I have found the man to analyze computer capabilities. He is Jeff Wells, a student at California Institute of Technology. You'll read about his work shortly. Cal." He made a mental note to fax the memo as soon as possible.

Jeff demonstrated his program, using only the information available before the actual earthquake in China. The results were inconclusive. Then he punched up another overlay that included the satellites passing over the area. "This is data from Dr. Landill's observations," he noted. Suddenly, the program came alive. A warning indicator flashed on the screen with an arrow pointing directly at the city of Beijing. The program then showed a steadily increasing probability of a major earthquake, predictable as much as two years in advance. As time progressed, the calculations became more and more precise until one month before the disaster the warning sign shifted to an alarm predicting an earthquake on the order of 6.5 to 6.8 on the Richter scale. The orbit of a low-orbit U.S. spy satellite developed what looked like a wobble on the expanded scale of the computer-enhanced program.

Finally, using data from several other lesser quakes, Jeff demonstrated the capabilities of his program. "It is not as accurate with smaller quakes," he apologized. Some of the less stuffy scientists chuckled.

"That's like apologizing for the brush strokes in the Mona Lisa,"

one of them muttered, setting the entire room into laughter—with a few exceptions.

"With some more refinement, I believe we will be able to predict major earthquakes accurately, both in time and magnitude," Dr. Eison added from his position next to Jeff. "We'll take this prototype program and work out the details. Show them the real thing, Jeff," he said somberly.

As his fingers flashed across the keyboard, Jeff progressed to the last stroke necessary and then halted.

Dr. Eison announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, what you are about to see has already been screened and verified by members of my staff. For the immediate future, it cannot be made public. That is the responsibility of President Kilborne and his national security adviser. You will be advised when the information can be announced."

"Okay, Jeff. Proceed," Dr. Eison said as he sat back down.

The screen shifted back to the global picture of the earth. Then, as it rotated slowly, the image first zoomed in on the North American continent. Then the United States. Finally, the state of California filled the entire twenty-foot screen.

Jeff stroked more keys and small red lines began to appear on the outline of the state.

"These are fault centers," Dr. Eison explained. "At present, they have not been given an intensity value."

As Jeff tapped more keys, the red images shifted to bright and dark shades. The brightest appeared in the lower third of the state's image, very near Los Angeles. A second lighter red image appeared in the upper third of the screen, near San Francisco.

Dr. Eison explained, "The image at the top is the San Francisco fault. Conventional wisdom has been telling us the Pacific Plate will rift here. And we have been concentrating our evacuation training here. If you will, please, Jeff."

Jeff changed the image so that the state of California was superimposed over that of the entire globe. Suddenly, satellites appeared, crossing in nearly every conceivable angle.

"These satellites have been provided courtesy of the Russians, the Chinese, the Libyans, and the Japanese," Dr. Eison said in a sarcastic tone. The room erupted with laughter.

As the orbits passed over California, each satellite dipped and wobbled. It looked as if some mighty magnet was trying to dissuade them from passing that way. Homing in on the northern fault, the program began to spit out calculations. Earthquake Predicted: 1999; Location: San Francisco fault; Magnitude: 5.6 to 5.8; Estimated Damage: Minimal.

A hushed sigh went out from those in the room who had family and friends in the Bay area. A major quake had been predicted there for so long that everyone thought the end might come any day, but a 5.8 earthquake was like a popgun to that area; it might rattle a few buildings, but little more.

Without speaking, Dr. Eison motioned to Jeff to continue. The program now zoomed in on the other side of the Pacific rim, namely the southern part of Japan, where another bright red line appeared. Once more the calculations began: Earthquake Predicted: 1999; Location: Tokyo; Magnitude: 8.2 to 8.4; Estimated Damage: 2.3 to 2.5 million deaths.

The gasps made in the room by the non-scientists sounded like a scene from a horror movie, but even as they were trying to comprehend what they had just seen, the image was zooming in even closer. The display showed the city of Tokyo in computer imagery just after the quake struck. Virtually no buildings were left intact in the downtown area. For forty miles around, the program displayed massive fires and destruction.

The next insert read: Residual Tremors Predicted: 6.5, 6.3, 6.0, 5.4, 4.9, 3.5 over the next seventy-two hours. Predict Tokyo uninhabitable for at least twelve months.

Even as the roomful of scientists and reporters was trying to absorb the enormity of it all, the screen shifted again.

Tsunami expected in Pacific basin. Amplitude: 300 feet. Rate of Travel: 300 to 400 mph. Expected Target: Philippine Islands and U.S. West Coast. Inland wave in California predicted at 16 feet.

"The earthquake will create a tidal wave—called a tsunami—that will travel across the Pacific at a rate of three to four hundred miles per hour," Dr. Eison explained. "It will hit the Philippines and California with the force of a multi-megaton bomb. The backwash from the wave will hit the coast of California and will sweep inland, virtually wiping out the Southern coast for at least one mile inland."

"Doctor, do you realize what you're saying?" shouted one of the reporters. "Thirty million people live in the area you describe."

"I realize that all too clearly," Dr. Eison answered solemnly. "I hope we're wrong, but I don't think so."

"What are you planning to do?" asked another reporter. "I live in L.A. and so do several million of our readers."

"That's really not up to me. That is a decision for the governor and the president."

This is our chance to take Governor Crow out of the race, thought Cal Rutland, aide to presidential candidate Mark Hunt. All we need is a disinformation campaign. . . .

CHAPTER

2

THE ILLUMINATI

When the news about the predicted California tidal wave hit the media, the public reacted predictably—with panic and outrage. The press demanded that Governor Crow do something. However, there was nothing that Governor Jerry Crow could do to prevent the natural disaster, and his popularity rating dropped dramatically; it was exactly what Mark Hunt's election committee was hoping for.

An avid and vocal gay rights activist, Crow had hopes of being the first gay to run for the presidency under the banner of a major political party. His successful moves to revoke the tax-exempt status of most of California's religious institutions had won him national acclaim. And his petition to the FCC to revoke the licenses of all religious broadcasters in California had launched him on the path to the White House. When the FCC granted his petition, most of the stations were turned over to the gay power groups. This same strategy was used across the country to unseat the several thousand religious broadcasters then in place. With most of those stations under the control of gay power groups, Crow had a national forum.

Although it had been only three weeks since the information from Jeff's program had been made public, to Crow it seemed like a lifetime. Everywhere he went the media were there, asking what he was going to do about the crisis. The pressure drove him back to his old escape mechanism: cocaine.

What do those idiots think I can do about an earthquake? Crow thought angrily as he woke in the aftermath of a severe cocaine crash. He had agreed to kick the habit when he made the run for the presidency; his advisers had told him the country wasn't ready for a president who used drugs. *I'll change that*, he decided as he snorted another line of the white powder. *I'll get drugs legalized and use the*

tax revenues to build more shelters for the homeless. In fact, he thought with a stroke of genius, we'll use those useless church buildings for homeless shelters. "I'll teach those pious hypocrites," he said aloud. "They're against anything progressive."

Later that morning as the governor was discussing the earthquake with an aide, he quipped, "It might not be so bad to get rid of half the people in Southern California." The aide winced and said, "Don't repeat that in public, Governor. A lot of voters in Southern California wouldn't agree with you."

"They're all a bunch of crazies," he shouted. "What do they expect me to do? Do they think we can just tell an earthquake to go away? I think Hunt's using this thing to make me look bad. Why couldn't a tidal wave hit Virginia?"

The aide looked away from the drug-laced governor with contempt. He knew Rutland was right when he argued that Hunt would be the better candidate. The governor was a disgusting representative for gay power. Maybe the next election. . . .

As with most crises in America, interest began to fade within a few weeks after the initial furor. Several well-known scientists came out against the predictions given by Jeff's program, citing flaws in the logic, particularly the part about the effects on satellite orbits. Governor Crow immediately focused on these, complaining to all who would listen that the whole idea was a plot to discredit him personally.

"We will not be diverted in our efforts to save lives in the area where the earthquake is expected," he announced. "But we simply cannot spend countless millions of dollars on the word of a slightly neurotic college student."

Then on May 12, 1999, an earthquake with a magnitude of 5.4 struck the California coast just north of San Francisco. Since hundreds of thousands of citizens had been evacuated from the area, there was virtually no loss of life, except for the few derelicts sleeping inside abandoned buildings. In fact, there was very little damage to existing structures since new building codes had been initiated after the '96 quake, in which hundreds of lives were lost as several office buildings collapsed.

Immediately Governor Crow issued a statement on public radio and television vindicating the position he had taken on the supposed earthquake in Japan: "As you can see, our plans were right on target. Our evacuation saved hundreds of lives, and the earthquake struck exactly where our experts said it would. Californians can rest easy tonight under the leadership of Jerry Crow."

At the Executive Office Building in Washington, D.C., the phone in Dr. Lowe's office started ringing as soon as the news of the quake in

California was known. Dr. Lowe, the senior technical adviser on President Kilborne's staff, picked up the receiver and heard, "Doctor, this is Cal Rutland. I assume you have seen the news report on the earthquake in California?"

"Yes I have," the tuxedo-clad scientist replied. He was about to attend a formal banquet at the White House for the Japanese ambassador.

"Are you still certain about the other event?" Rutland asked, referring to a conversation they had had the day after the Livermore press conference.

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I was just preparing a report for the president on the need to evacuate the Southern California coast. I can find no flaw in Wells' prediction of a Pacific tidal wave."

"We don't think that will be in the best interest of our candidate, Dr. Lowe. We would like for you to advise the president that you disagree with Wells' conclusions."

"But this report is conclusive," Lowe argued. "When that quake hits the Japanese islands, we'll have a wave on the West Coast that will rival the destruction of Pompeii."

"Doctor, sometimes the few must be sacrificed for the good of the many. Remember the group to which you have sworn allegiance. Ours is the responsibility for building a better, more secure world for future generations. With the governor refusing to act and the president taking no action, the support for Senator Hunt will increase."

"But I will be finished in the scientific community when it gets out that I ignored this data," Lowe contended as he slumped back in his old leather chair.

"We'll make sure that when the facts are known, Doctor, they will show that you recommended immediate action by the president but he chose to ignore your advice. You will be exonerated totally. Just say nothing—other than sending a memo directed to President Kilborne's eyes only."

"You can do that?" the startled scientist asked.

"There is very little we cannot do, Doctor. We have been preparing for this election for a very long time. Longer than anyone outside can imagine."

Lowe shuddered involuntarily as he listened to Rutland's plan. The destruction that a tsunami of that magnitude would cause was almost incalculable. "Are you absolutely certain about this earthquake?" Rutland asked coldly.

"No one can be entirely sure of something like an earthquake," Lowe replied cautiously. His hedging was conditioned by years of political maneuvering. "But I have reviewed the data from Wells' pro-

gram very carefully and I believe it is accurate—even brilliant."

"You had better be right, Doctor. We cannot afford to make Governor Crow into a viable candidate at this time. We're too close to our goal now," Rutland said sharply.

"I understand," Lowe assured him. "I want this just as much as you do."

"Just remember that the Society makes no allowances for failure!" Rutland said coldly.

Rutland represented a group that had actually been formed nearly three hundred years earlier in Europe, and the group from which they sprang had been formed centuries before that—when the Roman Empire was little more than a few loosely knit tribes.

The original group had been known as Druids. They were the titled gentry of Middle East traders who had developed from tribes of roving bandits. The Druids became a vicious, secret society dedicated to the preservation of their members at all costs. Nothing was beyond their order of "ethics," including murder, kidnapping, and slavery.

Later the Druids took on a nearly supernatural aura in the minds of the simple people they dominated. Their wealth and power made it possible for them to operate outside the confines of the law. Those who opposed them would simply disappear, never to be seen or heard from again. Thus, rumors circulated that the Druids had the power to make people vanish. As the stories were told from generation to generation, they were elaborated and exaggerated. Eventually the Druids were equated with demons and various gods.

So similar were the men who inherited leadership in each successive generation, they seemed to be the reincarnate images of their predecessors. Thus also began the legend of eternal life within the Druids: reincarnation. In truth, it was the intense dedication to a single organization and centuries of exacting training that kept the group so uniform and seemingly reincarnate. However, these legends served the purposes of the men who served the organization and were therefore preserved and promoted.

As Europe developed into the dominant economic center of the civilized world, the Druids saw their influence waning because few Europeans were interested in or impressed by the superstitions of the Middle East. To extend their influence in Europe, the Druids changed their name to the Freemasons and adopted many of the same rituals and religious traditions practiced within the Christian churches. These rituals, mixed with Eastern mysticism, resulted in almost instant acceptance.

Immediately many of the leaders of society were wooed into the

order of the Freemasons, and they in turn brought in many of the second social level who were anxious to associate with the elite. From the Freemasons, a small group of world leaders emerged, dedicated to the establishment of a worldwide order, known as the "Illuminati," or "the enlightened"; later they would be known only as the "Society." Each member of this group was carefully chosen from the larger group of Freemasons. Each represented the highest level of authority within his particular discipline. Thus the group contained not only political figures, but also religious, economic, academic, and military leaders.

The group flourished from just after the time of Christ until the fifteenth century in Europe. When the New World was discovered and the pathways to America opened up, leading members of the Freemasons were sent with the earliest pilgrims to ensure their foothold on the new continent.

By the time of the Revolutionary War in America, most prominent American leaders were counted among the Freemasons. As centuries passed countries came and went, along with their rulers, but the Masons continued to flourish. Eventually the movement in America spread to the common man and millions of working class people were recruited to the order of Freemasons, thus ensuring their acceptance in a democratic society.

But always at the top, unknown to all but the very few, was the ruling body known as the Society. This group made decisions determining which wars were to be fought and how they were to be funded. By the time of the First World War, their economic power was so great that governments could be toppled simply by the movement of money and support as directed by this group. Generations passed and the old line died off, but still the Society persisted.

Now, nearly two hundred and fifty years after America had become a nation, the Society was stronger than ever, and its original purpose was becoming a reality: a one-world economic system, controlled and directed by this shadowy group of the most influential men (and now women) in the world.

For hundreds of years the Society had been taught that a chosen one, or "Leader," would rise to bind the world into a single economic unit. Several times in history men had risen to positions of power from the inner circle of the Society to grasp the reins of power. Notable among them in the twentieth century were Lenin, Hitler, and Mao Tse-tung. But the time was not right for the one-world system, and each in his own time had been subverted and ultimately defeated.

Little known to the rest of the world at the time was that the purges executed by Stalin in Russia were to eliminate the order of Freemasons that threatened his power base. His attempt to demolish the

Society doomed communism to oblivion as the Society directed an economic attack against the party. By the late 1980s, when another Russian leader was appointed to the inner circle, the economies of both Russia and China were virtually destroyed. The Russian economy was steered back to prosperity under the control of the Society.

The Society in America progressed on a parallel track to that of Europe. Because of the enormous economic wealth of the United States, it was necessary for the Society to organize yet another group of influential leaders who would serve as advisers to the inner circle. This group became known as the Council on Foreign Relations. Comprised of some of the best-trained minds in America, the Council eventually took on a semi-official government position as advisers, not only to the Society, but to presidents as well.

Thus, a system of governments within governments developed worldwide, the ultimate purpose being a base of power from which the "Leader" could control the entire world.

In the computer room at Andrews Air Force Base, Jeff Wells was developing a program to calculate the effects of the tsunami on the California coast. What he read in the printouts made him wish he hadn't looked. He checked and rechecked his equations because it seemed no one was taking his prediction seriously.

"The coasts of Southern California and Mexico should be evacuated," he had told Dr. Eison. He was sure that Eison agreed with his conclusions, yet even he had failed to do anything about it.

Jeff thought, *Here I am—hidden away in a government facility, isolated from the press and their questions. It is almost as if someone wants the disaster to occur.* His thoughts were interrupted when he heard, "Mr. Wells?"

"Yes," Jeff answered, as he was startled back to reality.

"Come with me," Rutland said. It was more a command than a request.

"Where are we going? I have a lot of work to do," Jeff replied defensively, even while he was getting to his feet. The look in Rutland's eyes had put him in motion. And without any further word, Rutland held the door, clearly indicating he expected to exit immediately.

"I'd like some answers," Jeff said with as much gusto as he could muster. "Why am I being detained?"

"You'll get all the answers you want," Rutland said with a semblance of courtesy. But his eyes revealed what his lips didn't; he had no intention of discussing the matter.

Jeff followed Rutland to another part of the building, to an office where Senator Mark Hunt was waiting, seated in a leather chair be-

hind a large desk. As they entered, the senator spoke. "Ah, young Mr. Wells, I presume."

"Yes," Jeff replied, recognizing the senator immediately. He had read much about Senator Hunt in the newspapers over the last several months, as had everyone in the country. Most of the media proclaimed him to be the answer to the nation's troubles.

With the economy in its thirtieth month of recession and more than twenty million Americans unemployed, a change of administration was certain, and the front-runners were Senator Hunt and Governor Crow. According to the papers President Kilborne still had a chance, but only if the economy took an unexpected turnaround. Personally, Jeff liked Kilborne. He had a lot of good ideas, but he was saddled with an economy so weighted down with debt that many predicted another five years of recession before it would begin to recover.

Jeff was greeted with a warm smile as Senator Hunt motioned for him to sit down in the chair nearest his desk. Cal Rutland took a chair across the room, as if to become a spectator.

"I assume you know who I am, Jeff?"

"Yes, sir," Jeff said honestly, relaxing a bit as he felt the personal warmth of Hunt's smile and courtesy.

"I won't try to snow you, Jeff . . . uh, may I call you Jeff?"

"Yes, of course," the young scientist replied.

"Good! I understand you're some kind of computer whiz. Is that right, Jeff?"

"Well, I don't know about that, Senator Hunt," Jeff said hesitantly.

"Please. Call me Mark. And don't be so humble. I like men who are the best at what they do. If I'm going to lead this country out of the mess it's in, I'm going to need men who are confident of their own abilities." He glanced across the room at his aide as he added, "Cal here thinks you're the best at what you do. Or you're going to be." Cal twisted a bit in his chair but remained silent.

"I need your help, Jeff," Hunt continued. "When I'm elected president, we're going to need to bring this nation's economic system out of the dark ages, and it will take all of us working together to do it. We can no longer hide our heads in the sand."

"But Sena . . . uh Mark, I don't know anything about economics. Surely you have advisers who . . ."

Hunt didn't let him finish. "I have plenty of people who understand how economics used to work, Jeff. We don't need those old-fashioned ideas anymore. We must either become innovators or become a third-rate power. My administration will have the best minds working on the economic models. What I will need most is that

computer brain of yours. Cal tells me you stumped the boys at Livermore."

"Well, I don't know, sir. They didn't want to believe what my program predicted."

"Idiots, Jeff. You remember that. They are idiots! It's the same mentality that is trying to hold this country back. I want you to learn all there is to know about how the world banking system operates. Then I want you to design a computer system that will connect every computer in the world to each other."

Jeff wasn't sure he had heard correctly. "Link all the computers to a common data network? Why that would take a computer larger than . . ."

Hunt interrupted to say, "I don't care what it takes, Jeff. We have the same kind of idiots working at the World Bank that you saw at Livermore. Dr. Eison and a few enlightened souls will cooperate. Your job will be to galvanize them into a working team, and Cal will handle the others," he said as he glanced across the room at Rutland.

"You see, Jeff, everyone we have contacted so far says that it would take a computer that doesn't exist yet to do what I want. But let's not worry about that now. I want you to design a program that will make the 'Data-Net' work now."

"The 'Data-Net'?" Jeff queried.

"Yes, that's what we're going to call the system. I want the McDonald's in Moscow to be able to talk to the McDonald's in Paducah, just like I can with my bank. And I want every transaction to go through one central location here in America. We will become the clearinghouse for every transaction in the world. Can you do it?"

"I don't know, Senator Hunt," Jeff replied, reverting to the formality he felt most comfortable with. It was hard for Jeff to call someone of the senator's stature by his first name. "But I would like to see some data to evaluate. Maybe some from the Federal Reserve."

"We'll do better than that, Jeff," the senator said excitedly as he got to his feet and started around the desk. He leaned against the edge of the desk near Jeff. "We already have you cleared to review the existing World Bank System in Brussels that was started by the Kennedy administration back in the sixties. You'll have full access to all records."

"You can do that?" Jeff was clearly impressed.

"You'll discover that we can do a lot, Jeff. There are many people in the world who think it's time to link it all together. You just get that brain of yours to perking on the problem."

"One thing, though," Cal Rutland interjected suddenly from his spectator position across the room. "Don't mention to anyone that

you're working with the senator. If the press finds out, they will make an issue out of it."

Hunt straightened to his feet, walked back around to his chair, and, looking at Cal with some disdain, he said, "If you had let me finish, I was going to talk to Jeff about that."

A quick glance at the senator's aide revealed to Jeff what he thought was a glimmer of hatred in those dark eyes. Jeff was getting a bit nervous and involuntarily rubbed his hands together. He recalled what he had heard his father say often when he was a child. "In the real world the big fish eat the little fish . . ." and then he would add, "unless the little fish is a piranha." Jeff suspected that Cal Rutland was one of the piranhas.

Just then, Jeff thought of something else. "I've got a problem, Senator. I've still got classes that will start soon at Cal Tech."

"Jeff, when your predicted earthquake hits, I think I can guarantee you a Ph.D., based on your work. That is, if there is anything left of Cal Tech."

Even as he spoke, Mark Hunt knew he had said too much. A glance at the expression on his aide's face told him that the Society would not take his offhand remarks well. Stiffening a little at Rutland's frown he thought, *So what! I'm the only viable candidate they have.*

"Then you actually believe the wave will hit California?" Jeff asked cautiously.

"I told you I believe in you, Jeff. So if you say it will, I believe it." Even as he spoke, he remembered an earlier meeting with Kilborne in which he had assured the president that Jeff's prediction was not credible. At the press meeting tonight with the Japanese he would dump the whole load on Kilborne.

"Why don't you tell President Kilborne then?" Jeff blurted out with an unexpected surge of courage and emotion.

"Whoa! Just a minute, Jeff," Hunt quickly replied as he looked over at Rutland, who by now was looking away. "I did tell the president, but no one wants to believe it."

"But a million or more people may die," insisted Jeff as his mind reviewed the computerized scenes of the tsunami sweeping inland. "And what about the Japanese?"

"We'll warn them again, Jeff, but right now everyone wants to believe the San Francisco quake was the 'big one.'"

"That's ridiculous," Jeff said defensively. "My program clearly predicted a smaller quake approximately twelve days before the shift in the plates below Japan."

"Twelve days!" Hunt snapped. "Did you tell anyone else about this?"

"Yes, of course I did. I told Dr. Eison at Livermore."

"Well, then, I'm sure the president knows too," the senator said, trying to appear calm. "Maybe they just don't want to believe you, Jeff." Inside, the senator's heart had done a flip. If that quake had hit before the press meeting with the Japanese, he would have lost the edge. Then he realized that the meeting had been scheduled exactly ten days after the California quake. Somewhere inside he felt a tinge of uncertainty. He thought, *They knew, but they didn't tell me. They must have set the time for this evening's meeting. They control Kilborne's schedule too!*

Cal Rutland was perceptive enough to know what was going through the senator's mind, so he stood quickly and said to Jeff, "Well, we should get you back to your work." *Let Hunt wonder why he wasn't told about the timing of the second earthquake,* Rutland decided wordlessly. *The Society has a few more surprises for this pompous idiot.* After a hurried good-bye, Jeff was ushered out of the senator's office, while the senator was slipping on his dinner jacket for Kilborne's reception.

In the next morning's newspaper, the press conference reported how the president's science adviser, Dr. Robert Lowe, had publicly resigned after stating that he had warned President Kilborne that the west coast of California should be evacuated. The article also noted that Senator Mark Hunt had personally urged the president to act while there was still time to warn the people of California and also the Japanese.

The president denied that either his science adviser or Hunt had suggested that the program, created by Cal Tech student Jeff Wells, was believable. However, the reporters present were given documents bearing the president's own initials, proving that Dr. Lowe had notified the president at least twice of the impending danger.

The report in one newspaper read: "President Kilborne was seen storming out of the meeting and has been unavailable for comment. Some members of Congress have suggested that if the predicted wave does strike the California coast, the president should resign. The latest polls show that approximately 70 percent of American voters now believe the potential disaster is imminent. Both President Kilborne and Governor Crow now trail Senator Hunt by at least 20 percentage points."

C H A P T E R

3

DISASTER STRIKES

It always amused Haru Ashimo, lead engineer at Nippon Industries in Tokyo, to observe foreigners visiting Japan for the first time when one of the many tremors hit. Tremors that nearly gave most Americans heart failure scarcely fazed the Japanese in multi-story buildings. Western visitors would turn white with fear as the buildings swayed and would often gasp, "What's happening?" Usually the Japanese would simply sit rigidly in their seats waiting for the tremor to subside. A few of the more Westernized might joke by quipping, "I don't know. It might be an earthquake." Then they would pretend to duck under their desks for protection, only to reappear immediately while their Western counterparts cowered beneath desks and tables. Far too polite to laugh, the smiles of the Japanese nonetheless betrayed their amusement at the sight. When the tremors subsided, the Western businessmen would crawl out from under tables red-faced, as they observed the Japanese going quietly about their work.

When the tremor began on May 25th, most of the stoic Japanese just sat placidly, while others gathered the loose items on their desks to keep them from crashing to the floor. They had ridden out many tremors before and accepted them as a common occurrence. Usually the tremors would last only a few seconds at most. The "earthquake-proof" buildings would sway on their huge roller foundations and then settle back into their normal positions.

On this particular Thursday morning, the building at the Nippon Industrial Complex seemed to sway more than usual. Instead of a normal five-second tremor that quickly subsided, this one began to build. The Nippon building, one of the safest in Tokyo, had been constructed to the highest earthquake standards only two years earlier, so the workers felt entirely safe.

Within ten seconds, the building was rocking and lurching like a

wild bronco, and for the first time an expression of fear was evident on the Japanese workers' faces.

"My God, the building is going over!" Kimo Sarusso, one of the engineers, shouted over the rumble of the quake.

"Be quiet!" snapped Ashimo from his position at the lead engineer's desk. "This building is designed to withstand earthquakes. It will not fail."

The tremors were now coming with such intensity that the whole building felt as if it was being launched into space. Suddenly a crack appeared in the outer wall where the windows and support structures came together. Ten seconds later the twenty-story building became a massive heap of rubble and broken bodies.

Outside in the streets, people were trying desperately to escape the falling debris from the collapsing structures. Unfortunately, there was no place to hide. Huge chunks of concrete came rocketing down among thousands of people who instinctively threw up their hands to cover their heads.

Upper story windows shattered, showering those below with razor sharp shards of glass. Entire streets were lifted stories high and dashed to the ground, flinging cars and trucks as if they were children's toys. At Tokyo International Airport, jumbo jets on the runway were tossed high into the air, as if thrown by some invisible hand. The giant 797s crashed back onto the tarmac like birds crumpled by a hunter's shotgun blast.

Delta Flight 44 was approaching Tokyo Airport when the first big shock wave hit. The flight controller, Mira Akai, seeing the scope she was watching go blank, had the presence of mind to key her mike and shout, "Delta 44, abort approach and turn to a heading of 213 immediately!"

John Grey, the captain of the 797 Boeing fan jet, immediately applied power to go around. It seemed like an eternity as the big engines spooled up to takeoff power. Out of his window, he saw the runway buckle and bulge toward his aircraft. It all seemed to move in slow motion as a mountain of asphalt rose to meet the floundering aircraft.

"Roger, retract the gear!" Captain Grey shouted to his copilot. The many hours in the simulator now paid off as the copilot reacted instantly to the captain's command and pushed the landing gear control all the way in. The plane rose in response to the reduced drag and began to climb slowly.

"Max power!" Captain Grey ordered. "Firewall it!"

Again the copilot responded as directed and shoved the engine controls full forward to the emergency position.

The big turbo fan engines providing power to the descending aircraft had now spooled to 70 percent of their power curve and the plane wobbled skyward.

"Now if she'll just hang together," Grey shouted over the whine of the engines as he rolled the aircraft to the right in an effort to escape the rising mountain of runway.

The plane just cleared the edge of the runway when the ground erupted into a shower of dirt and debris. The mammoth jet plane vibrated as it was struck by the erupting ground, but it continued to rise above the turmoil.

"Thank God we weren't hit by the pavement," the captain said as the perspiration dripped off his forehead. "It would have been like flying through shrapnel." He eased back on the wheel as the plane continued to climb, now well above the chaos below.

"Man, that's as close as I ever want to see an earthquake," his copilot said as he flexed his hands. He had been gripping the controls so tightly that he had a difficult time moving his fingers.

"Yeah," agreed Gray, "but think about those poor devils down there." He pointed out the window to the ground below. It looked as if a huge plow had cut its path right through the center of the world's busiest airport.

Flying west over the city of Tokyo, the passengers and crew of Delta Flight 44 were witnesses to one of nature's most savage displays of raw power. Every structure in downtown Tokyo was swaying, and hundreds of older buildings had crumbled into piles of debris, surrounded by plumes of dust that obscured the skyline in some areas. Bridges connecting Tokyo with its lifeline of highways had collapsed, throwing hundreds of vehicles into the sea. The tunnel connecting the main island to the outer islands, built at a cost of nearly \$12 billion, had broken open, creating a huge siphon as the sea water rushed in.

"Poor devils," Captain Grey said again, despondently. "What an awful way to die—trapped in an undersea tunnel!"

The quake lasted seven minutes, reaching a peak at the epicenter of 8.6. In that seven minutes, three million people were killed in and around Tokyo, and several million more were injured. Virtually all power and communications were cut off from the world's financial center, causing chaos on the world's markets.

Aftershocks would continue to strike the island for the next five days, causing more damage and complicating the rescue process. But in that first seven minutes, nearly \$4 trillion worth of property had been destroyed. Many of the world's largest and most sophisticated manufacturing plants dissolved into rubble.

Unknown at that time, an even greater disaster was developing

under the Pacific Ocean. There had been earthquake-born waves before in history but never on the scale generated by the Tokyo quake. Historians reported a tsunami hitting the Philippine Islands in 1792 after the eruption of an underwater volcano in the Pacific Basin, north of the Philippine Trench. The wave was estimated to be three hundred feet high in the shallows of the China Sea, and traveled at approximately two to three hundred miles an hour. Several ships at sea were lost and never heard from again, obviously victims of the huge wave. Only the sparse population in the Philippine Islands kept the death toll down to twenty thousand.

Two characteristics of the quake in Japan now combined to create disaster on the far side of the Pacific. First, the plate shift was so massive and violent that the underwater land mass displacement was estimated at six trillion cubic yards, or approximately equal to the size of the state of Georgia. That much mass shifting position pushed an incalculable amount of water ahead of it. Second, the land mass moved in exactly the plane Jeff's program predicted: an easterly direction from the Japanese islands, toward the western United States.

As the volume of water pushed its way beneath the ocean only a slight swell appeared on the surface, but beneath the surface a rip tide some two thousand feet deep and four hundred miles wide was sweeping across the Pacific at a speed of several hundred miles an hour. Even though media services picked up the accounts of the earthquake in Tokyo from airborne observers, such as Flight 44, no hint of the impending disaster approaching the U.S. mainland was reported. An Enterprise-class nuclear submarine traveling four hundred feet below the surface on maneuvers reported the underwater shock wave, but the transmission lasted only twelve seconds before the sub broke into pieces. Underwater sonar detectors used to track Pacific traffic recorded the sounds of the crumpled hulk sinking to the ocean bottom. They also picked up the sounds of two other nearby subs splitting apart like model toys.

Once the underwater wave hit the shelf near the west coast of California, the water backed up and began to force its way to the surface. Billions of tons of water, propelled at more than four hundred miles an hour, became a full-fledged tsunami by the time the wave was three hundred miles from the coast.

In the weather radar tower at Point Magoo, California, Frances Akins was taking her hourly check of the Pacific weather conditions, prior to transmitting the marine report. The sky showed no appreciable accumulation of cumulonimbus, or thunder boomers, as Bill Frank, the local TV weather man, insisted on calling them. *I wonder why they always seem to pick the buffoon types to do the weather on*

TV, Frances thought to herself as she checked weather scopes. *I'm sure he flunked the third grade twice.* Then, as she viewed the radar sweep one more time, something began to appear on her scope.

"What the . . . ?" she exclaimed as the image on the screen began to develop into what looked like a mountain to the west.

"What's the trouble, Frances?" Andy Maury, the station supervisor, asked. Andy had taken over operation of the Magoo weather station after the Navy decided to shut the facility down as part of an economy move during the Kilborne administration. He had thirty years of forecasting experience, including his twenty-three-year stint with the Navy, mostly aboard the big carriers. Not only was he the director, but he was also part owner of the now-private forecasting station, which sold information to the local television stations as well as various marine groups.

"You'd better look at this, Andy," Frances said as she thumped the screen in a characteristic reaction left over from the days when CRTs were run by vacuum tubes. In the environment of integrated circuits and crystal displays, thumping did little but serve to relieve frustrations. Refraining from a second thump, Frances said, "I think the Doppler must be conking out. It shows the ocean is growing a mountain." Even as she spoke the image grew larger; it looked like Mount Rushmore had been transplanted to the Pacific and was headed toward the California coast.

"Well, I'll be . . ." Andy Maury said. "What do we have here?" Even as he spoke his mind signaled an alarm. He had seen a similar image somewhere in his past. "Have you recalibrated the scope lately?" he asked, knowing that Frances would have done so earlier.

"Of course!" she answered indignantly. "I do it before every scan."

"I knew you had, Frances, but I still had to ask," Andy said apologetically. He knew she was a competent meteorologist and was more than slightly sensitive about being the only woman in a crew of ten men.

"I know, Andy," she said in a more contrite tone. "But everything was fine when I started the noon sweep."

In addition to the normal array of meteorological radar gear, the Magoo station had the newest laser equipment, dubbed the Weather Wizard. Although still relatively new equipment, a trained operator, which Frances was, could track a Pacific storm to within a few feet as it approached the mainland. It was this equipment to which they now turned.

"Crank up the laser and point it at your mountain," Maury suggested. "It's probably just a false echo, but I'd like to be sure."

Inside, the station director wasn't nearly as calm as he appeared outside. *I know I've seen this before,* he thought as his mind raced, seeking the answer. *Come on, bring it up,* he chastened his struggling memory. *I know this pattern from somewhere. . . .* Secretly he was praying it was just a simple equipment failure, but deep inside he felt an uneasiness.

Frances quickly cycled the laser "Weather Wizard" through its self-tests. The system was designed to verify squalls and other weather conditions containing solid or liquid particles, such as rain and hail. Its use in tracking rain storms, thunder clouds, tornadoes, and the like was unparalleled in meteorology.

"It's calibrated and ready to go," Frances announced as she flipped the scan indicator to long range.

Suddenly the display screen was filled with the same image that was showing on the Doppler. The automatic alarm on the laser system screeched out its warbling sound, indicating a major obstruction in a scanning field that should have been clear.

"It's a tsunamil!" Maury shouted as his mind clicked with the image that was now being displayed on both screens. "I saw one like this in the Navy when an earthquake struck mainland China. Look at the size of that thing! It must be nearly three hundred feet high."

"A tsunami!" Frances repeated as she tried to decipher what that meant. "How could a tsunami just appear from nowhere?"

"It's from the earthquake in Japan," Maury shouted as he reached for the phone. "I'll call Los Angeles International and see what they have." Even as he spoke, he punched the auto dialer to ring the National Weather Service station at the L.A. airport.

The calm greeting from the L.A. tower told Maury they were oblivious to the potential disaster.

"L.A. Weather. Robert Atkins here."

"Bob, this is Andy at Point Magoo. Do you guys have anything on your long-range radar at about 210?"

"Yeah we do, Andy. But we thought we were having an echo blip on the system so we dropped back to the seventy-five mile range. Why do you ask?"

"Because what you saw is not an echo!" Maury literally screamed into the phone. "It's a tsunami heading toward the mainland."

"A tsunami? That's impossible," the head of the National Weather Bureau for the Los Angeles area replied. "This thing just popped up on our screen a few minutes ago. It's got to be an echo."

"I'm telling you it's for real, Bob. It's from that quake in Japan, I think. Probably surged underwater until it hit the shallows. That

thing is going to hit your area in less than an hour. You need to get all the planes you can in the air!"

Atkins sat at his desk without responding for several seconds. Was Maury kidding him? He had never heard him say or do anything that was non-professional. But a tsunami? "Look, Andy, I appreciate the call, but you must be wrong. How could a tsunami make it across the Pacific without us knowing it? Besides, we would have been warned well in advance."

"Bob, you've got to believe me! It's a tsunami! The biggest I've ever heard of, and it's going to hit your area in forty-seven minutes at its present speed. Remember the stories in the papers about the possibility of a wave from the Japanese earthquake? Well, they must have been true and this thing is the result."

"That was just some wild theory by a college kid, Andy. Our guys in Washington said to forget it."

"Just cycle your radar over to long range and start tracking this thing and you'll believe it! You need to get every plane in the air and then try to get your people out of there!"

"Yeah, well, thanks a lot for the tip, Andy. I'll see what I can do," Atkins said as he leaned back in his chair. *I can just see the inquisition in Washington if I empty L.A. International on a tip that a tidal wave might hit*, he thought as he sipped his coffee. *No way I'm going to do that with three years left to retirement*. His thoughts drifted to the home he and his wife, Sara, had just bought down in San Diego. *Not on the beach*, he reflected, *but close enough to walk on it anytime we want to*.

"Wait, Bob!" Maury shouted as the phone went dead. He knew his counterpart at the airport weather station was not going to listen. He hung up the phone and tried to decide what to do.

The next twenty minutes were pure frustration as Andy Maury attempted to call everyone he knew at the Weather Bureau in Washington. All he got was a lot of "I'll tell him you called when he returns, Mr. Maury." No amount of pleading or cursing could get even one of the secretaries to alter her normal routine. His shouting about a tsunami might just as well have been a casual warning about an impending rain storm. Nothing he said had impressed them. *Naturally not*, he thought sarcastically. *They live three thousand miles from the Pacific*.

Maury was not the only person trying to alert the nation. At the office of the president in Washington, D.C., the phone rang. Clarence Barrett, the president's appointment secretary, answered it: "President Kilborne's office."

"Clarence, this is Andrew. I need to talk to him right now!" Secre-

tary of Defense Andrew Singer, a no-nonsense ex-chairman of the joint chiefs, had been chosen by Kilborne to restore some discipline in the demoralized ranks of the military, which had been decimated by budget cuts. Recently he had been trying to ferret out what appeared to be a secret society among some of his most influential military leaders. General Gorman, chairman of the joint chiefs, had reported that several top ranking officers were engaged in secret meetings outside the normal service protocol. If he didn't know it was the top brass of the United States military, he might have thought it was the beginnings of a military coup, he had told the president earlier. But that was not the subject of this call. He had just gotten word that one of his boomers had gone down in the Pacific. And even more frightening was the report of missile subs lost by the Russians and Chinese, who had probably been shadowing his sub.

"What's it about, Andrew? He's in conference with some Senate group."

"You need to get him out! One of our boomers is down and so are two other subs—one Russian and one Chinese."

"I'll get him!" Barrett said immediately. *What now?* he puzzled. *The president's had about all the bad news he can stand to have dumped on him, except the start of World War III*. He trembled even as he considered it. World tensions were at an all-time high since the depression hit. Clarence Barrett punched the interrupt code reserved for messages of the highest priority.

President Kilborne leaned over to his interoffice phone, glad to get a short respite from the verbal lashing he had been receiving from the Senate leaders because he had ignored Bob Lowe's earthquake warnings. It still hurt as he remembered how Lowe had shafted him. "Yes, Clarence, what is it?" he whispered into the receiver. Then he realized he didn't have to whisper since only he could hear his secretary.

"Mr. President, Andrew Singer is on the hot line. I think you need to talk with him. It's urgent." The tone in Barrett's voice transmitted the alarm he had picked up from the secretary of defense.

The president pressed the mute switch as he turned back to the senators, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, you'll have to excuse me for a few minutes." Even as he spoke, Barrett, who had opened the office door, was directing the irritated senators out of the Oval Office.

"I'll be back, Mr. President," the senator from Ohio said very curtly. "You still have some explaining to do if you want my support."

Kilborne sighed as he punched the talk button. *Maybe I don't want your support*, he thought. *Maybe I don't want this job anymore*.

"What's up, Andrew?" the president asked as he mentally braced

himself for more bad news. *Maybe I won't have to worry about the next elections, he contemplated. One more disaster like that press conference, and the Democrats will probably lynch me.*

"We've lost a missile sub in the Pacific, Mr. President. And the Russians and Chinese have lost the attack subs that were trailing her."

Suddenly Kilborne was totally alert. "Did we have an exchange?" An exchange of warship hostilities was another way of saying nuclear battle.

"No, sir. None that we know of, and the monitors on the radiation satellites show no signs of nuclear detonation."

"Thank God," Kilborne said with obvious relief. "Then what happened?"

"We don't know, sir," the ex-general, nearly twice the age of the president, replied.

"As well as I can determine, we had a distress call from our boomer saying they were caught in a sub-surface current of some kind. The next thing we heard was the sub breaking up. The Russians reported much the same thing. The Chinese aren't saying anything at present, as is normal. They just lost one-third of their total attack sub force so they'll be hot. We've already sent them assurances, through channels, that we didn't sink their sub."

Thank God, it wasn't an exchange, Kilborne thought as he tried to piece together what this might mean. Just then his secretary broke in over the intercom again.

"Mr. President, Dr. Patrick Holmes is on line two. He says it's most urgent. I told him you were talking with General Singer and he says it's related."

Dr. Holmes, head of the U.S. Oceanographic Committee which coordinated all the industrial nations to manage the oceans, was the most knowledgeable government official on international use of oceans. His office managed hundreds of surveillance satellites and underwater pollution detectors to see who was dumping their wastes in the oceans and harvesting more fish than allocated. The committee operated much like an ocean cartel, controlling the use of the common seas. He also had the best communications with the various scientific groups from each country. He had just received an urgent message from the monitoring station outside the west coast of the United States.

"This is the president," Kilborne said slowly and deliberately as he transferred over to line two of his private phone.

"Mr. President, I have just received word from our monitoring station in the Eastern Pacific that a three-hundred-foot tsunami is headed toward the California coast. It will hit in less than thirty minutes."

"What! Are you sure, Patrick?" the president shouted in spite of himself.

"Very sure, Mr. President," the young oceanographer said. "The wave traveled across the Pacific in the trenches until it hit the shallows. Now it's bunching up. The surface wave is traveling at over three hundred miles an hour."

"Just what Wells' program predicted!" Kilborne shouted in anger. "No wonder Lowe stabbed me in the back. He must have been working for Hunt. What do you suggest, Patrick?"

"Nothing. There's nothing we can do now."

PANIC

I want every radio and television station in Southern California to go to emergency broadcast," President Kilborne instructed his civil defense director, Craig Newball, over the phone.

"Why, Mr. President?" the startled Newball questioned as his feet fell off the desk top and hit the floor below.

"A tsunami will strike the California coast just above Los Angeles in less than twenty minutes," Kilborne snapped impatiently. "Notify everyone who can do so to head inland. And Craig . . ."

"Yes, Mr. President," the elder member of the civil defense team replied breathlessly.

"I want a full contingent of civil defense people mobilized in California immediately. Call Crow and have the National Guard brought out. If he gives you any static, tell him I'll nationalize them if I have to."

They really did a job on Crow, too, Kilborne thought. *Whoever they are. . . .*

For ten minutes some radio and television stations in Southern California blared out an emergency alarm, but nearly three-fourths of the stations wouldn't interrupt normal programming to carry the message. A few disc jockeys assumed it was some elaborate practical joke and simply ignored it, and many of the listeners thought it was just another test of the emergency broadcast system. It didn't really matter because the Californians who did believe the broadcasts were scarcely into their cars when the gigantic wave struck.

The unbelievable force of the wave as it hit the shore, bringing with it tons of debris from the sea, shook mountains as far inland as San Bernardino. The Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth II, anchored at the Los Angeles harbor as floating casinos, were swept up in the wave and flung miles inland, along with thousands of other vessels.

The sound of the wave was bone chilling. Everything in its path was swept before it. Buildings and houses alike collapsed under billions of tons of water crashing inland at nearly three hundred miles an hour.

The wave penetrated nearly three miles inland before the fury of the tide beat itself out on the hills and valleys surrounding the greater Los Angeles area. Further to the south, in the less-populated communities along the coast, scarcely a person survived the roaring torrent of salt water. As the water rushed back to the ocean it carried with it homes, cars, and people; few would ever be recovered from the depths of the Pacific.

Even as far north as San Francisco, the ocean rose nearly twelve feet, causing massive damage to sensitive ecological systems. Buildings collapsed as their foundations were undercut by the rushing water. The bay area suffered an estimated \$3 billion in damage. Some three thousand lives were lost, but with the enormity of deaths in Southern California, these went almost unnoticed except by friends and family.

Disaster relief teams were flown in from every part of the country, as well as from Canada and Europe. In an effort to control the marauding bands of looters drawn to the disaster area, civil defense armies were formed out of National Guard units from around the country. The fighting between civil defense troops and heavily armed gangs became so intense that units of the U.S. Army had to be flown in to reinforce the National Guard troops. The scene in Southern California took on the appearance of a war zone. President Kilborne authorized the troops to shoot on sight anyone found looting or molesting another citizen. Civil rights groups, led by the National Civil Liberties Union, screamed that such action was a violation of basic human rights. In the wake of devastation, few Americans lent a sympathetic ear.

As the marauders expanded their territory to neighboring states, it appeared that a civil war might break out for control of the area. Automatic weapons were in such demand by frightened citizens that they became the currency of the day. An M-19 automatic assault rifle sold for as much as ten thousand dollars on the black market.

Viewed from the air the coast of California, from just north of Los Angeles to south of San Luis Obispo, looked as if a nuclear blast had hit the area. All the structures that once had housed businesses and residences were swept into the sea or deposited along the coast for several hundred miles, creating navigational hazards to ships that were bringing in relief materials. Pirates, both American and Mexican, terrorized the coastline in power boats modified for use as assault craft. Ships approaching the California coast were in constant danger of being boarded and pirated. The U.S. Navy had to provide heavily armed

cutters to patrol the shoreline in support of the relief ships. Even so, small-scale naval battles were fought as the pirate boats often matched a cutter's firepower. Even the redirection of several larger naval vessels did not deter the pirates. Their smaller crafts were no match for the Navy's bigger ships, but their speed and maneuverability made them difficult targets.

Full-time television coverage saturated American viewers with scenes of the ravaged west coast. The blame for the disaster was placed clearly upon President Kilborne and Governor Crow. The nightly news carried interviews with leading government officials who were demanding Kilborne's resignation. It was fruitless for Kilborne to even attempt to appear in public. Friends and families of the victims in California, gathered outside the White House, shouted and screamed obscenities at him whenever he was seen. The media refused to provide any time for the president; for all intents, he was a man without a country.

Seeing what had happened to Kilborne, Crow attempted to shift all the blame onto the president, even going so far as to insinuate that California officials had plotted to keep the disaster from the public at the president's orders. Both men's ratings plummeted in the polls.

Senator Mark Hunt addressed the nation regularly on the need for a strong president to lead the nation out of the economic crises caused by this natural disaster. In an interview on "The Nation's Leaders," a program that achieved an unprecedented first place in the prime time ratings, he said: "Fellow Americans, we face a time of the gravest dangers. The man who will lead this country in the coming years will either be a savior or a devil. As of today, the government has run out of funds to operate. Years, and even decades, of misusing public money has bankrupted the wealthiest country on earth. I would like to say here and now that I don't believe that President Kilborne, a long-time Democratic ally, purposely deceived the people of this nation. He simply lacks the leadership ability to handle the situation. His earlier indecision cost more than a million lives; further indecision may cost our freedoms.

"I have offered a bill in the Senate banning the possession of firearms. I acknowledge that the Constitution gives Americans the right to own and bear arms, but our founding fathers could not have foreseen armed gangs of criminals looting and raping their neighbors under the protection of our Constitution. I also realize that there are special-interest groups within this country that oppose my bill. To them I would say, 'Go to California, and then tell me about your right to bear arms. What about the rights of the honest citizens being terrorized by armed criminals?'

"As president I will authorize the Army to arrest and confine anyone found carrying a weapon that can be used against another person. I will restore law and order to this grand nation."

Following Hunt's address on television, the media provided scenes of the new battle lines in California where armed bandits were assaulting a town. Women and children were being gunned down; horrifying scenes filled the screens of American homes. Skillfully sprinkled in between the graphic scenes were on-the-spot interviews with hysterical mothers carrying dead and wounded children. Screaming mothers cried, "Help us! We need to get rid of *all* guns!"

In another segment, Mark Hunt interviewed a well-known psychiatrist about the proposal to ban all firearms. "I believe the psychological advantage will swing to the public. The criminals will know that carrying firearms will result in their arrest and conviction. I would say it would be a definite plus for all Americans."

The nightly Insta-pol showed an overwhelming 88 percent of all American viewers approved the senator's bill. Calls flooded the Senate and House, demanding its immediate passage. Within two weeks, the bill banning possession of all firearms became law. Kilborne vetoed the bill, stating that he believed it to be unconstitutional.

When the new poll results came in, they showed that Senator Hunt's commanding lead virtually eliminated all other candidates from the upcoming presidential primaries. Clearly Mark Hunt was to become the next Democratic candidate for president of the United States. The more tightly the depression gripped the nation and the more violent the criminal element became, the more Americans were convinced the country needed a strong, dynamic leader who could restore order.

The only issue left to be answered in the Hunt campaign was that of his vice-presidential running mate. Cal Rutland had advised Hunt to delay selecting his running mate. He didn't need a strong candidate since he was miles ahead in all the polls, and a weak candidate might hurt him before Kilborne and Crow were eliminated in the primaries.

This issue was the subject of a meeting between Hunt, Rutland, and two members of a group of investors that had backed Hunt's political career for the past three years. Cal Rutland called them the "Society." The meeting was held at Hunt's expansive summer home in Boone, North Carolina.

"Senator, we're very pleased with the way you have handled yourself in the media. You will have the full confidence of the American public when you take over the White House," commented industrialist Jason Franklin.

"Thank you," Hunt said as he surveyed the older man, whom he knew by reputation only. He was chairman of the Franklin Foundation, which held assets of over \$2 trillion in companies all over the globe. It had been rumored that Franklin himself was dead because so few people had actually seen him over the past ten years. In spite of himself, Hunt was awed. He knew that one word from this man could plunge nations into ruin, not to mention better-than-average politicians. Now he knew where his campaign funds had been coming from the past three years. Franklin was his benefactor.

"I have to say that I am both honored and somewhat amazed to see you, sir. I've heard it said that you had died."

"As you can see, Senator, the reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated, to quote a famous writer."

Hunt laughed with a gusto that betrayed his uneasiness in the presence of his newly discovered mentor.

"I would like to introduce you to someone who is a real fan of yours, Senator. In fact, she was the one who elicited my support for your campaign."

Hunt looked up. He could barely restrain a gasp as the light illuminated the woman's beautiful features. She was obviously older than Hunt, but her skin was unwrinkled and her features still sharp and unblemished. He knew her immediately, but the pictures he had seen scarcely did her justice.

"Mrs. Alton, what a great pleasure to meet you," Hunt said with his most charming smile. *Kathy Alton!* he thought pensively. Even though her astronaut husband, Colonel Lee Alton, had died leading the joint U.S., Soviet, and Japanese expedition to Mars in 1995, it was Kathy Alton who had actually saved the space program. Her open pleas to the world television public not to allow her husband's death to eliminate space exploration had turned the tide. In the last moments, as the Mars astronauts' air supply ran out, Kathy Alton was on television declaring that her husband's death was an acceptable sacrifice if future generations could explore the stars.

But that was before the Great Depression struck the world. Now money was so tight in the U.S. and Russia that all space exploration had been canceled. It was all the U.S. could do to keep the wheels of government running on one-third less income and ever-compounding debts.

Even so, Americans had adopted Colonel Lee Alton's wife as a symbol of courage and character. In a generation that had little to cheer about, great crowds had come out to see her as she toured the country. Without question, Kathy Alton was the best-known and most-admired woman in America.

Hunt was snapped out of his reverie as he heard Jason Franklin say, "Senator, Mrs. Alton is here at my request to discuss an important issue. As you realize, we have invested a great deal of time and funding into your campaign."

"I do appreciate all you have done, Mr. Franklin. I knew there was a supporter behind the campaign, but I didn't know who it was."

"When I say 'we,' I refer to the Society, not myself."

Suddenly Hunt was struck with a new realization. "The Society! Are you a part of the Society?"

"Let's just say that I agree with their goals, Senator. But more importantly, I want to know if you do."

"I'm not sure what you mean," Hunt said, now cautiously choosing his words. He had always assumed the Society was a group of philanthropists bent on having their influence felt in government, but Franklin needed no group through which to operate. He was the single most influential man in the world.

"The Society's goals include establishing a worldwide monetary system and a total world market."

"I certainly do agree with that goal," Hunt declared, perhaps too enthusiastically. "We need to re-establish the United States as a global economic power."

"The days for this nation or any other nation to rule the world economically are over, Senator Hunt!" Franklin said flatly. "It is time for the U.S. to accept the fact that we are a one-world system, not a self-first nation."

"But I don't see how that will be possible," Hunt argued. "Americans will never accept a minor role in . . ."

"They will accept it because they will have no choice!" Franklin snapped. "You will sell them on the idea, and we will provide the motivation."

Hunt just stood there, stinging from the reproach in Franklin's voice. It had been a long time since he had been scolded like a school boy. Even if he had wanted to say something, he couldn't think of anything at that moment. And the look on Franklin's face was clear; he neither wanted, nor expected, any response.

"What I wanted to talk about, Senator, is your running mate—the vice-presidential candidate. I have a suggestion to make."

Suddenly on his guard, Hunt realized that Franklin was not a man to make a casual suggestion about anything. He was accustomed to his suggestions becoming actions.

"I would like for Mrs. Alton to be considered as your running mate."

"Mrs. Alton!" Hunt blurted out. "But she has no political experience."

"That is a point in your favor in these times," Cal Rutland commented. "She has no political baggage to carry."

Hunt stopped for a moment to think. It was obvious that Cal knew about Kathy Alton before this meeting. But he hadn't shared his information. Mark Hunt then realized his aide carried a lot more weight than he had realized. He also knew he was backed into a corner.

"I'll need to give this some thought, Mr. Franklin," Mark Hunt responded with his long-practiced political smile.

"Do that, Senator," Franklin replied with only slightly veiled irritation. "But I will expect to hear from you on this matter within two days. In the meantime, I would suggest that Mrs. Alton and you spend a little time getting better acquainted. She can be a valuable asset to you."

Hunt realized that, as far as Franklin was concerned, the issue was settled. He had the sinking feeling that a trap had been sprung, and he was in it. He wasn't sure what Kathy Alton had to do with the Society, but he knew she must be a part of a larger scheme, which he had yet to learn.

As the senator and his aide flew back to Washington later that day, Rutland tried to strengthen Franklin's suggestion as he commented, "Think of it this way, Senator. Kathy Alton is bound to be a big asset to you. First, she is a well-known woman who is not associated with politics. Second, she has the ear of the most powerful man in America."

"Tell me something, Cal. Did you know Franklin wanted her as my running mate?"

"I knew," Rutland acknowledged matter-of-factly.

"Why didn't you tell me before the meeting, so I wouldn't walk in blindly?"

"I couldn't, Senator. I was instructed to keep my mouth shut."

After a slight pause, Hunt asked slowly and deliberately, "Who do you work for Cal? Them or me?"

"Both, Senator," he countered. "I'm on your team, but we're both on their team."

"Well, you inform the Society that I'm not some lackey to be told what to do. I won't take Alton," Hunt declared.

"You'd better think that over carefully," Rutland said coldly, his eyes riveted on Hunt's. There was a look of urgency in Rutland's piercing eyes. "That would not be a wise decision at all. Your campaign has

been financed at great expense to the Society, and they would not take a 'no' lightly."

"What can they do at this late date?" Hunt asked, trying to bluff his way as he had all during his political career. "I'm their candidate. Kilborne and Crow have been beaten by this earthquake thing."

"Senator, the goals of the Society are greater than any one man, including you or me. John Kennedy thought he could overrule the Society and learned better—the hard way!"

Hunt felt his bravado crumble as he heard Rutland's last comment. The aide knew his boss patterned his entire political career after his boyhood idol. The shock of his matter-of-fact announcement had its desired effect. *Could Jack Kennedy have been eliminated by the Society? Was that even possible?* Hunt asked himself. Yes, he decided, *it was. That would explain the misinformation surrounding the assassination and why so many witnesses died mysteriously.*

"Think of it as a positive step, Senator," Rutland continued without waiting for a response from Hunt. "Kathy Alton will represent no threat to your power in the White House. She will simply bring in a new dimension to your administration—the women of America. Her influence will rally the working women to your programs. You'll need their help to make changes."

"I guess you're right, Cal," Hunt heard himself say. He knew he was beaten. Then, in an attempt to salvage some of his pride, he added, "Besides, I suppose having the first woman vice president on my team won't look bad in the papers, will it?"

In the sleeping compartment of the big jet, Kathy Alton smiled as she listened to the conversation over the monitor. *He's a true politician, she thought to herself. His convictions last just as long as they encounter no opposition. He'll be an insufferable chauvinist, I'm sure. Lee would be amazed to see how far his sacrifice has brought me and how much further there is to go.* For a moment she was drawn back into her grief over Lee's death. Then, with a resolve steeled by years of indoctrination, she decided it was a necessary casualty of progress.

Three days later Kathy Alton was announced as Mark Hunt's running mate.

THE ELECTION

With the unprecedented move of announcing Kathy Alton as his running mate before the Democratic primaries, Senator Hunt nailed the coffin shut on President Kilborne's renomination. Even the president's staunchest allies began jumping ship, trying to strike a deal with the Hunt team.

The American voters, fed up with hard times and frightened by the growing violence nationwide, were looking for new leadership. Daily they were bombarded with scenes of looting and widespread civil disobedience, and daily Mark Hunt flooded the airwaves with promises of better times and an end to violence in America—just what the American people wanted to hear. As the economy continued to slow and revenues declined, Washington was forced to make more budget cuts. And with each new budget cut by the Kilborne administration, Hunt's position strengthened.

To most Americans, the nomination of Mark Hunt on the Democratic party ticket was the long-awaited answer to their many problems. The effects of the depression on those who were less than fifty years old were especially devastating since most of them had never experienced any really difficult economic times. The depression of 1929 was nothing more than a chapter in their Economics 101 textbooks. And the recession of 1994 had been tempered by massive government spending. To them it was an accepted fact that the government would hire the unemployed during a recession. That had worked fine as long as the money continued to flow in from the Japanese and from the European Community.

Few American workers grasped the fact that as the money poured in, ownership in many American industries shifted to Europe and Japan, especially Japan. By the year 1995, nearly half of all businesses in America were owned by the Japanese. "So what?" the politicians had

said. "After all, they still employ American workers and feed the American economy more money."

The day of reckoning began in January of 1996, when the Saudis announced that they were running out of oil and would be raising their base price by fifty dollars a barrel. With half the available oil reserves contaminated from the nuclear fallout of the Israeli bombs that had rained on Iraq and Iran during the 1994 war, the Saudis controlled 80 percent of the available Middle East oil reserves. The European Community had access to the north shore oil of England and France, but other countries scrambled to bid for the oil supply they needed.

Japan outbid the United States, winning by a wide margin. The U.S. economy received a double-barreled blast as a result. First, the available oil supply was reduced by 40 percent and immediate rationing took effect. Non-business vehicles were limited to ten gallons of gasoline per month, and prices shot up to nearly five dollars per gallon. This triggered an inflation rate of 30 percent per year, effectively wiping out many businesses, retirement savings, and Social Security. The elderly went back into the work force *en masse*. The competition for jobs between the young and old became a political issue.

Next, the Japanese began a systematic shutdown of competitive industries in the U.S., saving the jobs for their Japanese workers by shifting manufacturing back to their factories at home. By the time the public was aware of their strategy, most of the major industries were gone, and the only jobs available were in lower-paying service industries. The result was a devastating slowdown of the U.S. economy that dragged virtually every nation outside of the European Community and the Asian Triangle down with it. The Japanese began systematic price slashing to siphon business away from both the U.S. and Europe. In one year, they virtually captured the world market for automobiles, heavy equipment, aircraft, and defense armament. The result was an unemployment rate of nearly 25 percent in the U.S.

The next blow to the economy came as the Japanese gradually withdrew their loans to the U.S. government, citing their need to develop business within the Asian Triangle. Without this money to feed its ever-growing deficits, the government was forced to begin massive cutbacks. There was talk of a new constitutional amendment to rescind the Balanced Budget Amendment, but somehow Congress could never develop the momentum to push it through.

The desperate need for finances led the Kilborne administration to sponsor a bill to rescind the tax exempt status of all non-profit groups, including all religious organizations—a move proposed and supported by the National Civil Liberties Union and most other liberal factions. The bill was passed into law despite vigorous lobbying by

church leaders. The result was immediate economic trouble for all churches.

Christian leaders railed at the government's actions and promised picketing and mass demonstrations. Meetings were held in churches throughout the nation to discuss the growing trend toward disenfranchisement of Christians. The recognized leader of the protest movement was Pastor John Elder of Atlanta, Georgia. As the pastor of a ten-thousand-member Baptist Church and as a worldwide television minister, Elder was the principal spokesman for the evangelical community.

Elder was no stranger to controversy. He had organized and led three of the largest anti-abortion rallies in Washington. He had also organized a very effective grass roots organization, the Constitutional Rights Committee (CRC), to oppose politicians who were recognized as anti-Christian. At least six liberal senators and ten congressmen had been voted out of office through his efforts.

The *coup de grace* for the U.S. economy was delivered by the Japanese when they announced they were calling due nearly \$3 trillion loaned to the United States. They publicly stated that when the U.S. treasury bills they held came due they would expect prompt payment, because the money was needed to rebuild Tokyo after the earthquake. This announcement sent the U.S. stock market into its steepest decline since the collapse of 1929. Financial markets around the world reacted with panic as they feared the U.S. would default on its debt.

In a specially prepared message, Senator Mark Hunt announced that he had a plan for handling this latest demand by the Japanese and was sure he could work out a settlement satisfactory to both sides. Given the air of animosity that had built up between the two countries since the U.S. had imposed trade restrictions on most Japanese products, the majority of analysts scoffed at the idea. Two days later, the Japanese Minister of Finance, Ichiro Yamori, announced that some mutual compromise might be arranged. They decided to delay any decision until after the elections in America. The announcement came two days before the primaries. No one outside the inner circle of the shadowy group known only as the Society knew that Yamori's actions had been the result of a personal visit by Jason Franklin.

Senator Hunt obliterated Kilborne in the primaries. The mandate by the public was so great that not a single delegate dared to support the president at the convention. With the November elections coming up, Hunt had only to defeat a weak Republican candidate to win the highest office in the country.

The presidential election was not just a mandate by the voters; it was an ultimatum to the Congress. Hunt received 96 percent of all

votes cast. Never had a president been elected by so great a margin. The American voters were saying insistently, "Do something!" In an unprecedented move, Kilborne resigned his presidency, paving the way for Hunt to move his administration into Washington. Kilborne's vice president was sworn in to head a caretaker government until January, but in reality, the reins of power had already shifted to Hunt.

Mark Hunt was sworn in as the forty-fourth president of the United States in January, with some two million cheering admirers filling the capital. The inauguration of Kathy Alton as the first woman vice president was hailed by women throughout the world. Even Hunt had to admit the wisdom in Alton's selection. She followed his campaign platform exactly, always deferring to his judgment when a new issue arose. The one thing that irked Hunt was the way the reporters catered to her. When the two of them were interviewed together, it was as if he didn't exist. His solution to this problem had been to send her to obscure locations—where he didn't want to go anyway. And, surprisingly, she had never objected to any assignment.

Hunt had soon settled into a routine of allowing Alton enough publicity to keep her current in the minds of the public, but behind the scenes otherwise. *Besides*, he mused as he glanced over at her on the platform—a picture of poise and beauty—*she's beginning to warm up to me*.

Had he been able to read Kathy Alton's mind, he might have reconsidered his attitude toward her. *A real show hound*, she thought as he strutted around the platform at a Washington press conference. *He's in his glory*. She chuckled silently as he strutted back and forth, obviously for her benefit. *He will learn, though*.

The failing economy provided the catalyst the liberals needed to step up the assault on Christians. In the first six months of the Hunt administration, Elder witnessed an alarming trend toward anti-Christian hostility in the media. All pretext of objectivity was gone, particularly at the biggest and most influential network, the World News Network.

What had been a "situation" became a crisis when the FCC confirmed the ban of all Christian broadcasts on radio and television. The last straw came when the administration pushed a bill through Congress taxing all church property and income. Elder pulled out the stops and rallied his followers to organize demonstrations protesting this blatantly unconstitutional action.

Without access to any public media, John Elder fell back to his only option: organizing "grass roots" committees to keep Christians informed. He and his group began printing weekly newsletters an-

nouncing protest rally dates and locations. Condensed versions were distributed through church bulletins in thousands of churches throughout the country.

Elder decided that a mass rally should be organized to confront the Washington politicians. As a forerunner, smaller planning meetings were scheduled in churches by the thousands.

Tony Moran was one of the group leaders whose function was to coordinate his church's participation. He received an urgent call from John Elder's headquarters instructing him to schedule a planning meeting for that evening. Some of Elder's contacts in Washington had notified him that President Hunt had decided to sign an executive order authorizing the so-called "Crack Babies Bill," abolishing the babies' civil rights.

"Notify your group that we're going to march on Washington next Saturday," Randy Cross, a leader in John Elder's Constitutional Rights Committee (CRC), told Moran.

"I don't know if we can get our group together that soon," Moran said. Inside he had a sinking feeling that once they made their move publicly there would be no turning back. He wasn't at all sure he was ready or willing to take that step.

"If we don't act now, it will be too late," Cross warned him. "If the 'Crack' bill becomes law, they'll begin processing the kids. John says we need to act now!"

Tony Moran put the phone down. His hand shook from the fear he felt welling up inside.

"What's wrong, Tony?" Susan Moran asked her husband when she saw his ashen face.

"The committee wants us to call an emergency meeting to plan a march on Washington Saturday."

"We knew we'd have to take a stand sometime," his wife said as she put her arms around him.

Susan spent the next three hours calling every member of their church's CRC group. The meeting was set for seven o'clock that evening.

"I don't think we should go tonight," Tony said as his wife completed her last call. "We're taking an awful risk."

"We have to take a stand sometime, Tony," she replied as they sat down to eat. "First it was the ban on Christian radio, then television. Then the tax on church property, and now this terrible Crack Babies Bill. Who knows what may be next? Maybe they'll declare it unconstitutional to witness."

"You don't understand," Tony said grimly. "Remember Robert

Barnes? Well, he got fired from his job this week because he insisted on reading his Bible at lunch. It's tough enough for us to make it now. What will happen if I lose my job?"

"I don't think a job is as important as a life, Tony. Besides, we're not plotting anarchy. We're just trying to protect those who can't defend themselves."

Susan Moran sounded a lot more confident than she felt. She had seen the trend, even in their own neighborhood, toward religious intolerance. The more the government legitimized it, the more overt it became.

I wonder if this is the way persecution came to the Jews in Germany? she thought. *Were they just eased out of society until nobody really noticed they were missing?*

Even as the Morans were preparing to meet with their group, a meeting was taking place in the White House that would have a profound effect on their future.

"I simply can't believe this report, Cal," President Mark Hunt remarked as he reviewed the document before him.

"Believe it, Mr. President. The FBI has firm evidence that the religious right is planning government assassinations as a part of their opposition to your Crack Bill."

"But they've never been violent in any of their past protests. They shout and scream a lot, but in the end they adjust," the president said as he re-read the document about members of a religious group, calling themselves the Constitutional Rights Committee, who were planning to assassinate several Senate leaders and federal judges. It went on to say that the FBI had also uncovered a plot to assassinate President Hunt if he signed the so-called "Crack Babies Bill."

The Humanitarian Action Legislation, dubbed the "Crack Babies Bill" by the religious right, was legislation Hunt had first sponsored while in the Senate. Nearly twelve million babies born of crack and cocaine addicts over the last decade were wards of the government; over \$48 billion a year of taxpayers' money was required to care for them. Hunt had been genuinely surprised that there had been such an outcry in the Christian community when he first introduced legislation to utilize the crack babies for the good of otherwise hopeless people. His researchers had irrefutable evidence that these crack babies had less learning ability than a chimpanzee. And other than a few animal rights radicals, nobody minded using the chimps for the good of mankind. Not only would using the crack babies' organs help many terminally ill people, but it would also bring more than \$6 billion a year into the government and eliminate the drain of nearly \$50 billion to support and sustain them.

Virtually the entire country supported the bill, except the Christians. They had succeeded in getting the bill delayed in Congress, but one of his campaign promises had been to get the bill passed into law, which he planned to do by executive order immediately. The procedure on the crack babies would be done humanely. Those who were diagnosed as mentally deficient would be sent to government hospitals where they would be injected with coma-inducing drugs. From there they would be transported to organ banks throughout the world where their organs would be used to help productive people live useful lives.

Hunt slammed the report down on the Jeffersonian desk that had been used by so many previous presidents. "I want this made public, Cal. Get it leaked to the press so that it doesn't look like we did it. But get it done!"

"I'll do it, Mr. President," Rutland promised as he picked up the report. *Perfect*, he thought as he returned the report to the pouch labeled "Top Secret." *I knew how he'd react to that part about his bill.* Rutland smiled as he visualized the reaction to the article in the press. *The religious right can protest all they want, but the more they protest, the more they will appear guilty. As long as we control the media, the public will accept what we say as truth.*

THE ARRESTS

John! You're not going to believe this! Come here! Hurry!"

Pastor John Elder knew his wife was watching the morning news. For her the latest news, along with the current weather forecast, was a daily routine before starting breakfast. Julia Elder was a typical Baptist minister's wife most of the time, but lately her life was being reshaped. As a pastor's wife, she was accustomed to life in a "fishbowl" within the confines of their church membership, but as her husband was being thrust even more into the public eye in the protests against the government, she was being placed in a much larger "fishbowl."

In response to his wife's shout, he asked, "What's wrong, honey? Is the weather girl topless again?"

The comment was meant to be amusing but Julia was not in a humorous mood. Inside, the bile of fear was rising in her throat. "You'd better get in here, John. You're on television."

Elder hurried into the living room. As he entered, he heard the announcer from WNN say, "The FBI report states that an underground religious group known as the Constitutional Rights Committee, or the CRC, led by the Reverend John Elder, a Baptist preacher from Atlanta, Georgia, has made several threats on politicians who oppose the group's teachings. Elder, who heads a ten-thousand-member organization, has led many protests in the past, including the notorious 'midnight run' on Congress."

"That's a lie!" Julia Elder shouted. "We had nothing to do with breaking into the congressional building. Those were not our marchers."

"Of course, they weren't," Elder said, trying to calm her down. "Don't worry about it, dear." It wasn't surprising that his group was getting the blame. He had irritated both the politicians and the press

when he led several thousand peaceful demonstrators in a march on Washington to protest the government's blatant assault on religious freedoms.

The misinformation was created when the vandals who had been arrested claimed to be members of the CRC. Later he learned that they had done so in exchange for representation by the National Civil Liberties Union. All of those arrested received small fines and suspended sentences. Yet when some members of the Constitutional Rights Committee struggled with the D.C. police along the parade route, they had been arrested, cited for assault, and sentenced to three years in prison. In addition, CRC's demonstration permit had been permanently revoked, and as group organizer, Elder had received ninety days in jail for contempt of court. All the public saw were the short clips of his CRC members shoving the police. What the media didn't show was that the marchers had just been struck by night-stick-wielding police officers.

Elder's attention became riveted to the television. A reporter was asking the deputy attorney general from the Department of Justice what the government's response would be.

John Elder saw his own face appear in one corner of the screen as the young deputy answered, "We will watch this Constitutional Rights Committee very closely. At this point I cannot comment on our plans, but we certainly do take their threats seriously. Plots to assassinate members of government have been authenticated. This group has demonstrated that they will resort to violence if necessary to achieve their goals. We have evidence that they are teaching their members guerrilla tactics."

The scene shifted to a heavily wooded area where armed men and women were engaging in what was obviously combat training.

"Lies, lies! Those are not our people," Julia protested.

"Easy, Julia. We knew this wouldn't be easy. Just remember what I keep telling the members of our group. The politicians are not our enemies, even if they are against us. Our enemy is the master deceiver."

As tears welled up in Julia's eyes, her voice broke and she struggled to maintain her composure. "Maybe so, John, but you're going to be the one who will bear the brunt."

"A lot of God's people will bear the brunt, Julia. I just happen to be the spokesman right now. Remember that Peter and John rejoiced at being found worthy to suffer for the Lord."

"Yes, but I also remember that Peter was crucified and John was banished," Julia retorted, with just the slightest hint of her usual humor returning.

"I wish that we could be found as worthy," John said to no one in

particular as he sank into his favorite chair and turned his attention back to the news program. "Sometimes I think it would be easier to be martyred than to fight the politicians."

"This is Nathan Mather in Detroit; I'm outside the Government Service Center," the onsite reporter said. "With only three hundred new service jobs available for this city of one hundred thousand unemployed workers, nearly ten thousand people applied for the positions. The service center director tells me that according to the new job preference bill, only workers over sixty-five will be considered for these positions."

Stepping up to one of the younger men in line, Mather asked, "Sir, are you aware that the available jobs will be filled only with over-sixty-five workers?"

"Yeah, I heard that, but I'm goin' to stay in line anyway. I have a wife and four kids to feed."

"What do you think about the jobs bill since the Japanese car companies left Detroit?"

"I think it stinks. Hunt promised he would do somethin' to help us. I listened to his promises and voted for him; now I expect him to keep his word."

"Well, as you know, the older generation holds the majority vote in our country now. Don't you think it will be difficult to get support for any new jobs legislation favoring younger workers?"

After a moment's hesitation from the young man, he stood straight and spoke with conviction, "Maybe so, but I'll tell you this: these so-called older workers caused this mess we're in, and now they want us to pay the price. There's nothin' right about that! They may have the vote, but we have the power. We need Hunt to act." Looking away from the reporter and into the camera, he continued, "You hear me, President Hunt? Do somethin' now!"

A troubled John Elder turned away from the television. "It seems that every group is being pitted against the other. The young against the old, blacks against Hispanics, Christians against non-Christians. If anything else happens, this country could be in real trouble. Everything I see around us now reminds me of what I've read about pre-World War II Germany. Inflation was running 1000 percent per month, and unemployment was nearly 40 percent. The people were ripe for a political savior."

"But our economy isn't that bad, is it?" Julia asked. She wasn't sure if she was trying to convince herself or her husband. She knew John had a better grasp of history than most men of his generation.

"Our economy is in a depression and it's getting worse. Americans have always believed that the government had some magic genie that

could be called forth to save them from any economic trials. Now they know better. When President Kilborne announced that the FDIC could no longer insure bank accounts, depositors rushed to get their money, only to discover that there wasn't any money. So a lot of older people saw their life's savings evaporate, and they had to look for work. All this jobs bill has done is to alienate the younger people who are already strapped with tax upon tax. It's just a matter of time until our government runs out of money totally. Then they'll either print it or scrap it altogether."

"But the Balanced Budget Amendment is supposed to keep that from happening, isn't it?" Julia asked.

"Theoretically yes, but most Americans don't understand what it actually means to run out of money. It would cost millions more jobs and ignite riots in the cities. I don't know just what can be done, but I'll guarantee you the government is looking for a 'rabbit in the hat' right now."

"I don't understand," Julia said. "The government can't just ignore the Constitution. The Supreme Court won't allow it, will they?"

"Julia, we don't know how far politicians like Hunt will go to make themselves look good. Even the Supreme Court may not be able to stop him now. It's possible he is part of an effort to take over the government."

"What do you mean? You've hinted at that before."

"The attacks on Christians are accelerating since Hunt's landslide election. Our people in Washington believe there is a secret society within the government that is behind both the attacks and Hunt's election."

"What kind of society? Does it have anything to do with you being accused of heading a subversive group?"

"I don't know, but their strategy seems to be to stir up hatred of Christianity."

Raw emotion caused Julia's voice to waver as she said, "I can't believe we're in the middle of all this. This is America, not China."

Before her husband could reply, the sound of screeching tires was heard in front of the house. Julia looked out between the blinds and saw several men in dark suits emerging from two plain black cars. A mobile van from Channel Six TV pulled into the driveway behind them; several people jumped out and began to set up remote camera equipment. One of the dark-suited men yelled at the TV crew and the camera was quickly relocated at the edge of the Elders' driveway.

Two of the men approached the front door while another went around to the back yard. Julia's heart almost stopped as she realized they were probably surrounding the house.

"John, you'd better come look at this," she whispered as her knees began to weaken.

"What, honey?" he asked as he saw her pale. "What's wrong?"

Before Julia could answer, the front door burst open and two men pointing automatic weapons called out, "John Elder? FBI! You're under arrest!"

The last thing Julia remembered seeing was her husband's shocked expression—then darkness. She slumped to the floor, and as John attempted to reach for his wife, one of the men blocked his way and shoved him against the wall. In one swift motion he was handcuffed and a choke collar attached to his neck and wrists. John knew not to struggle against the collar. He had experienced the same apparatus when he had been arrested while leading demonstrations against abortion clinics.

Within minutes the news networks were showing footage of "suspected terrorist" John Elder, being taken to police headquarters by FBI agents who "had been tracking his whereabouts for several days."

After the news report, several hundred members of the Atlanta-based CRC gathered in the church sanctuary. The mood was one of shock and disbelief. There was a buzz of conversation until Bill Frost, area director of the CRC, stood to speak. "I know you're all worried about Pastor Elder. These are troubled times. If this can happen to a man of God, it can happen to any of us."

"Where's the pastor now?" someone asked.

"We don't know. All we know is that he was moved from the city jail to another location after the judge refused to set bail."

"How can he do that? I thought everyone was entitled to bail."

"They charged him with heading a terrorist organization, so the judge can deny bail."

"Terrorist organization!" someone yelled from the back. "You mean those accusations on television?"

"It would appear so," Frost said. The anger in his voice was evident. "We have attorneys working on it now. We don't know what the next step will be. When the pastor is arraigned, we'll know more."

"What about Julia?" one of the women asked. "Where is she?"

"They haven't charged her with anything, as far as we know. She fainted during the raid on their home. She's okay, but I understand she's under sedation. It was a traumatic experience for her."

It would be several days before anyone from the CRC heard anything about their leader. And then the news would change all of their lives forever.